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SUBJECT: NORWEGIAN DEFENSE VIEWS: A TOUR DE FORCE

Classified By: CDA Kevin Johnson for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In conjunction with an August 5-11 congressional staff delegation visit to Norway, State Secretary Espen Barth Eide gave a tour de force presentation on Norwegian defense policy. His presentations covered the High North, Norwegian military strategy, Russia's signaling behavior, and terrorism. Interestingly, he predicted a conflict in Georgia just days before it occurred. Septel will report GON reaction to the Georgia crisis. End Summary.

Meeting with Deputy Minister of Defense  
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¶2. (SBU) On August 6th, Espen Barth Eide, Norwegian State Secretary (Deputy Minister) for Defense gave a comprehensive presentation on Norwegian defense strategy and policy to a visiting congressional staff delegation, the Ambassador and others from the US Embassy.

Defense Policy framework  
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¶3. (SBU) Framing his discussion of Norwegian policy, Barth Eide cautioned against projecting the acute issues of today to the future. He suggested that there are three ongoing threats: (1) the so-called "transitional" European issues, exemplified by the wars in the Balkans; (2) 9/11 and asymmetric conflicts; and now (3) the "return of history" in the reemergence of geopolitics revolving around Russia, China, and oil. Barth Eide emphasized that old problems do not evaporate just because new ones appear, and Norwegian defense policy is organized around layered interpretations of what is happening in the world.

The High North  
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¶4. (C) Barth Eide emphasized that the High North was in a transitional phase, due to the increasing value of hydrocarbons and the decreasing ice which will make the polar route between China and the Atlantic economically feasible. He noted that Norway's maritime economic zone (fisheries and offshore petroleum) is seven times larger than its landmass. Negotiations on the disputed "grey zone" maritime boundary between Norway and Russia are moving at a "glacial" pace, and neither Norway nor Russia had any particular incentive to resolve the issue any time soon.

¶5. (C) Barth Eide noted the frequent presence of Russian ships around Svalbard, and the growing tensions surrounding the potential of hydrocarbon exploitation around the island. Norway posits a "fisheries protection zone" around the island, which is not universally legally accepted, but is he claimed tolerated by all nations. Barth Eide said that

low-level conflicts justified a Norwegian navy, as such conflicts would not result in NATO intervention. The presence of a frigate could "raise the costs" of Russian interference and send important signals about Norway's intentions.

¶16. (C) Barth Eide repeatedly emphasized the significance of Norway as the world's most stable oil and gas exporter, and said that ship-based gas deliveries, such as the new deliveries to Cove Point, Maryland, "change the strategic considerations." He suggested that increasing U.S. imports mean that there are increased security implications in the High North for the U.S.

#### Norwegian Military Capabilities and Future Plans

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¶17. (C) Barth Eide contrasted the position of Norway with that of a country like the Netherlands, which he said has effectively given up on defending its own territory and focuses only on international operations in conflicts like Afghanistan. Barth Eide emphasized Norway has a "double task": it must remain deployable to defend its territory in the High North as well as participate in international operations.

¶18. (C) Barth Eide justified recent moves toward Nordic defense cooperation by drawing two triangles next to each other, their lower two thirds overlapping and representing military support structure, and their top 1/3 pinnacles representing operational structure. "We want to maximize resources for the top third," so we have sufficient resources to "do things," and maximize cooperation in the bottom third,

for example through joint training infrastructures, so as to be able to "prepare to do things," Barth Eide said.

¶19. (C) The size of the Norwegian army is increasing, Barth Eide claimed, and High North issues are driving that trend. He commented that 90% of the Norwegian population support membership in NATO and understand the need for armed forces. Conscription remains mandatory in Norway, and those who are conscripted are generally happy, and those who do not want to be conscripted generally find a way out.

#### Russia's Projection of Power near Norway

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¶10. (C) Barth Eide had an emphatic view of Russia's significantly more visible projection of power near Norway. Since last year, Russian long-range bomber flights along the Norwegian coast have become a weekly occurrence, and NATO scrambles fighters to meet them every time. Barth Eide joked that the Norwegian press was becoming rather blasé about the press releases Norway issues every time this occurs, but Norway wants to signal to Russia that Russia is being watched. Contrary to Russian military authorities, who state that these are merely training exercises, Barth Eide interprets these flights as a clear signal that "nyet means nyet" when it comes to Russian red-lines like NATO membership for Ukraine. Barth Eide noted a recent massive Russian naval exercise in the middle of several Norwegian oil platforms--an exercise which required the oil companies to suspend helicopter flights to and from the platforms due to heavy Russian air activity. The Norwegians "politely" asked the Russians to take their exercise elsewhere, but Barth Eide noted with dry wit that "we have reason to believe that they knew that the platforms were there." Overall, Barth Eide said that recent Russian actions indicated that they want to signal that "their military capacities have been rehabilitated." Barth Eide tempered his remarks, however, by saying that given Russia's newfound wealth and self-confidence, it could hardly be expected to behave much differently with its military. Furthermore, he said that Norway has, and continues to anticipate, "healthy, positive" cooperation with Russia and engagement on developing the Shtokman gas field.

¶11. (C) Barth Eide then posed the question, "Will there be

more and more Afghanistans (i.e. failed states harboring terrorists)? Or more and more issues with Russia?" Significantly, he said, "we shouldn't punish Russia in the High North for what they do to the Czechs," manifesting a concern with Norway's own negotiating position rather than worry about overall Russian intentions. Barth Eide seemed to posit a fixed series of Russian interests, which, if frustrated, would lead to needless and avoidable conflict. He said, "Russia is drawing a red line around Ukraine, and red lines are what is at issue in the Georgia conflict."

¶12. (C) Prophetically, Barth Eide said that a war in Georgia and war with Iran were equally likely. (This briefing took place on the morning of Wednesday, August 6. War broke out between Russia and Georgia on Friday, August 8.) "Europe has not been 'fixed,'" asserted Barth Eide, challenging those within and outside of Europe who view Europe as an irrelevancy in global conflicts. "NATO in its classical version remains relevant," said Barth Eide.

¶13. (C) Barth Eide expressed a surprisingly benign view on Russia's "turning off the gas" on Ukraine and Belarus for political reasons. He said that while this issue rightly stirred Western debate on energy security (and he took the opportunity to reiterate Norway's stability as an energy supplier), he questioned whether Russian behavior was significant. He pointed out that Russia simply raised the price of gas to world market levels, and questioned whether western market-based democracies have any standing to question this behavior, even when it might be prompted by political concerns. Overall, these incidents pointed to the world transitioning back to a more historic commodities-based, rather than service-based economy, where "things are in physical locations, and this drives geopolitics."

#### Terrorism and Global Structures

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¶14. (C) In a typically broad statement, Barth Eide said that the world has paid much too much attention in recent decades to global structures such as the world bank, WTO and UN (Comment: Norway has done this more than most. End comment.). Barth Eide opined that the main problem is not the institutions or policies that tie states together but the weakness of nation states themselves. "Weak states have become the problem" in dealing with issues as disparate as AIDS and terrorism. Apparently not seeing any contradiction, he went on to state that combating terrorism should be strictly a police/intelligence issue, and is not a challenge of the armed forces. Ambassador Whitney pointed out, in rebuttal, that all of Norway's armed forces actively deployed are currently in Afghanistan, a conflict directly linked to terrorism. Barth Eide responded that militaries can help create conditions under which terrorism does not flourish, but this does not mean that they can fight terrorism directly.

#### Comment

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¶15. (C) Comment: Some of Barth Eide's comments seemed aspirational rather than realistic. At this time, for example, the Norwegian navy does not have a single frigate adequately manned to confront the Russians in the High North, and despite his "double task" comment, the Norwegian armed forces are not numerous enough to present more than a symbolic defense of expansive Norwegian territory. In fact, the commander of Norway's Army was recently quoted as saying that the army has only enough resources to defend a neighborhood of Oslo. Two tensions were evident from Barth Eide's presentation. First, there seemed to be a tension between viewing Russia as malevolent, and viewing its behavior as tolerable even when threatening. Second, Barth Eide's view that terrorism is a police action, is in conflict with NATO's and Norway's extensive involvement in Afghanistan. This latter tension reflects Norwegians' inherent discomfort with the idea of a "war" on terror. End

Comment.

¶16. (SBU) Septel will analyze the GON response to the Georgia crisis.  
WHITNEY